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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Chairman:	Mr. MORENO (Vice-Chairman)	(Cuba)
later:	Mr. HUDYMA (Chairman)	(Ukraine)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

1. In the absence of Mr. Hudyma (Ukraine), Mr. Moreno (Cuba), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

AGENDA ITEM 80: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/49/21, A/49/385, A/49/472)

2. Mr. AHAMED (India) said that in the contemporary rapidly changing world, information had become a critical ingredient in international diplomacy. Globalization of information had broken national boundaries, time zones and other natural and man-made barriers. However, obtaining information was not an end in itself. The information must be put to proper use and be complemented by knowledge and mature understanding.

3. Information needed an environment of freedom. India was fully committed to the principles of freedom of the press and free flow of information. It believed that freedom of expression was one of the inseparable elements of democracy. Precisely because of that conviction, India was a stable democracy despite the serious challenges arising from underdevelopment and ethnic, linguistic and other divisions.

4. The statistics about the Indian press spoke for themselves. The total number of newspapers in India in 1991 had been 30,214, with a total circulation of 53.8 million. In addition, its quality should be noted. The Indian press was as independent as the press in any developed country.

5. Radio and television had reached a significant portion of the 860 million people of India. India had developed the indigenous capacity to build, launch and operate communication satellites. It was one of the pioneers in using satellite broadcasting for educational purposes.

6. The Department of Public Information should certainly feel proud of its useful contribution to issues such as decolonization, the question of Palestine and the elimination of apartheid. The Department should now go on to deal with other issues which were of concern to States Members of the United Nations. Priority attention needed to be assigned to economic and social development.

7. During the sixteenth session of the Committee on Information, held in May 1994, many delegations had emphasized the importance of the information component of United Nations peace-keeping operations. The Department of Public Information should fill the gap in the publicizing of those operations and distribute information on the precise mandate and role of United Nations peace-keeping operations and the various problems then encountered.

8. During the session of the Committee on Information, the subject of integrating United Nations information centres with UNDP offices had been discussed at great length. His delegation hoped that the Department of Public

Information would take into account the views of delegations from developing countries and act without detriment to their interests.

9. The regional seminars on media development held in the past had been extremely useful. His delegation welcomed the next seminar, to be held in Sanaa in 1995, and hoped that the Department of Information would provide comprehensive support.

10. The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in October 1995 presented a valuable opportunity for public information activity. The Department of Public Information should take stock of the achievements of the United Nations and prepare materials on the purposes and future of the United Nations.

11. Mr. KARAMOY (Indonesia) said that the past year had been an important one in the strengthening of international solidarity and cooperation among Member States in the field of communication and information. The Committee on Information had again decided by consensus to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of two draft resolutions. It was particularly gratifying to note the spirit of compromise evident at that Committee's most recent session. His delegation remained confident that the spirit of cooperation and consensus within the Committee would be maintained and strengthened.

12. It was undeniable that in the modern world information and communication were rightly recognized as an inseparable part of progress. They also held great potential for helping to solve some of the critical problems facing mankind. However, the developing countries were still playing an insignificant role in the field of communication and information. It was therefore essential that the United Nations and its institutions should function more effectively and efficiently.

13. Keeping in mind the substantial disparity of information between the developing and the developed countries, active steps should be taken to establish the new world information and communication order. One of the ways of narrowing the gap was by building infrastructures. However, the question related not only to the development of communication systems, but also to what information was disseminated by the mass media.

14. Regarding the information activities of the Department of Public Information, his delegation wished to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report. With respect to the integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, his delegation believed that the objectives of presenting a unified image of the United Nations, enhancing information activities, including those on development issues, and achieving economies through common services, were indeed desirable. However, it shared the view of other delegations that the exercise should be undertaken cautiously, on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with the host Governments, so that the integration would be beneficial to those countries.

15. Indonesia attached great importance to the role of the Department of Public Information in disseminating information about the United Nations and its programmes in various countries. It was fully committed to facilitating the continued effective functioning of the United Nations Information Centre at Jakarta.

16. His delegation appreciated the efforts made to disseminate information on the major United Nations conferences scheduled for 1995. The Department of Public Information also disseminated factual and objective information on some priority areas, such as disarmament, peace-keeping, development, human rights and conflict resolution. His delegation hoped that in view of the forthcoming fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the Department would seize that unique opportunity to promote the Organization's many accomplishments.

17. Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakhstan) said that, at a time of rapidly changing political realities, the role of objective and comprehensive information was of particular significance. Free access to facts, knowledge and a broad range of opinions and the effective exchange of information enabled States, regardless of their level of economic development and political priorities, to resolve the most complex international issues through collective efforts and achieve mutual understanding on many urgent problems.

18. Her delegation associated itself with the commendation of the professionalism of the Department of Public Information in its coverage of the wide-ranging activities of the United Nations in the areas of the maintenance of peace and international security, the protection of human rights, economic and social development, environmental protection and so forth. An effective public information campaign had significantly contributed to the success of the International Conference on Population and Development.

19. In that context, efforts must be increased to further publicize the work of the United Nations and all the activities carried out under its auspices and, above all, events of global international significance such as the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held at Beijing.

20. The desire to actively develop international cooperation in the area of information had been stressed in the Declaration of Alma Ata on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Asian Media, which had been adopted at the United Nations/United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seminar held at Alma Ata in October 1992. Kazakhstan was prepared to engage in wide-ranging cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), UNESCO, the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), States of other regions and all interested parties in implementing the provisions of the Alma Ata Declaration.

21. Over the two years which had elapsed since the Alma Ata seminar, there had been a dynamic development of independent and pluralistic mass media in Kazakhstan. The Kazakhstan Television and Radio Corporation was successfully

operating and the number of independent publications had increased. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press were guaranteed under the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, under which citizens had the right to express their views and opinions openly and to receive and disseminate information and ideas in any of the mass media. Currently the mass media were working in six languages. It was the professional duty of the press and broadcasting media to transmit objective and truthful information; that was vitally important in a multinational State like Kazakhstan.

22. Mr. MACEDO (Mexico) said that, in an increasingly interdependent world, the exchange of information was expanding from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. With the existence of broad flows of information, efforts must be made to reduce imbalances through more effective international cooperation. His delegation joined the consensus achieved on the draft resolution entitled "Information in the service of humanity" included in the report of the Committee on Information. It was necessary to cooperate and support the adoption of measures to reduce existing discrepancies in the flows of information.

23. His delegation also supported the efforts made by the United Nations in the area of public information since it recognized that broader and more detailed information on the goals, objectives, work and activities of the Organization helped promote a positive view of those goals within Member States.

24. His delegation greatly appreciated the work of the Department of Public Information in producing publications and disseminating information about the United Nations and also other initiatives aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of its work.

25. His delegation stressed the importance of the publication Development Forum. It welcomed the efforts to promote better public understanding of disarmament issues through the dissemination of informational materials on those issues. United Nations information centres throughout the world, non-governmental organizations and the mass media could be means of disseminating and distributing those materials.

26. In the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/49/385), it was indicated that so far 16 United Nations information centres had been integrated with the offices of UNDP. His delegation agreed that the views of the receiving countries should be taken into account, and also that special attention should be paid to ensuring that the functions of the information centres were not undermined.

27. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations was a unique opportunity for the broader dissemination of information about the United Nations. Information must be disseminated about the considerable successes achieved by the United Nations in the areas of decolonization, disarmament, the development of international law and cooperation in maintaining peace.

28. His delegation was concerned that for millions of people the work of the United Nations was associated only with peace-keeping operations. The

Department of Public Information should ensure that more attention was paid to disseminating broader and more detailed information about the work of the Organization.

29. Mr. SENGWE (Zimbabwe) said that the Committee had a considerable amount of unfinished business since there were still 18 Non-Self-Governing Territories. His delegation urged the Administering Powers to cooperate with the Committee in order to make the United Nations objective of eradicating colonialism by the year 2000 a reality. In its view, the Department of Public Information should continue to play its catalytic role with respect not only to the 18 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories but also to other areas of conflict like Western Sahara and Palestine. His delegation commended the Department for its coverage of Africa's economic development through its publication Africa Recovery. Most of the developing countries did not have an adequate communications infrastructure, which would be an engine of growth. Those who owned and controlled modern communications technology influenced the perceptions of the recipients and thus shaped international public opinion. The Committee could play a critical role in highlighting the need to help the developing countries gain access to the information highway and in setting the "traffic regulations" of that highway.

30. The most savage battleground was now in information technology. As had been predicted 10 years previously, that battle was for control over the global information networks. Those who controlled advanced communications technology also controlled the flow of information in the world. Although the cold war was over, the glaring disparities which were to have been eliminated under the New World Information and Communication Order still persisted. The developing countries had no lack of communications policies. The main problem was in the shortage of resources, both human and financial. Furthermore, the transfer of communications technology was hampered by conditionalities similar to those which were applied in other areas of development. UNESCO had established IPDC in 1980 at Belgrade with the objective of encouraging the development of communications and ensuring a better and more balanced exchange of information of all kinds. At the first African regional meeting of IPDC, held at Yaoundé, Cameroon, in 1980, the African Ministers of Information had concluded that although Africa had attained political independence, the continent was unable to benefit fully from the extraordinary advancement in communications, science and technology. That situation had not changed. Africa, and all developing countries, needed not only producers of information programmes but also communications technology. Information had to be balanced by ensuring that developing countries too had effective access to the information highway and control over the information conveyed. His delegation was convinced that communications experts from developing countries should now be producers rather than perpetual consumers of programmes, that would truly contribute to making "a better world" a reality.

31. Mr. ODEVALL (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that it was of the utmost importance to maintain the consensus reached in the Committee on Information with regard to United Nations policy and activities in the sphere of public information, a consensus which had been discerned in the

General Assembly during recent sessions. Since the General Assembly had adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the conditions for exercising the right of information had globally undergone radical changes. Increased access to information had contributed to a closer relationship between the nations of the world and had influenced the political agenda in many countries. For example, in Rwanda the misinformation propagated during and after the hostilities was considered to have been a major factor in inciting the massacres and the subsequent exodus of refugees into neighbouring countries. It was therefore pleasing to see that the United Nations was developing a broadcasting capability which would give the Rwandese people increased access to information.

32. The Nordic countries considered that at its previous meeting the Committee had properly taken into account the far-reaching changes which were taking place in international relations. It was important for the general public to get a realistic view of what the United Nations was doing, could do, and was restricted from doing in its role as the guardian of international peace and security. At the same time, the Nordic countries once again emphasized the continuous need for the Department to further rationalize and streamline its activities. Celebration of the United Nations fiftieth anniversary and the holding of the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women would provide very good opportunities to spread the message of the objectives of the United Nations Charter. The Nordic countries attached great importance to an active approach to public information policy in the case of peace-keeping operations, since objective information could promote a more accurate understanding of United Nations action.

33. Regarding the United Nations information centres, which played such an important role in the sphere of information, the Nordic countries supported the Secretary-General's policy of integrating the centres with other United Nations offices on a case-by-case basis whenever there was an opportunity to rationalize the work of the agencies. The Nordic countries wholeheartedly welcomed the fact that the Secretary-General had decided to reintroduce more extensive guided tours which would include the Security Council chamber. The Nordic countries would support the draft resolutions and draft decision recommended for adoption in the Committee's report (A/49/21), and hoped that they would be adopted without a vote.

34. Mr. MONGBE (Benin) said that the Department's efforts to reorganize its work in order to make it more effective and targeted were praiseworthy. He also noted with satisfaction that the range of information provided had been increased through the use of modern technology, which would enhance the effectiveness of the work of United Nations information centres and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices. In his delegation's opinion, more attention should be devoted to the negotiating process within the framework of the International Convention to Combat Desertification.

35. It was important to note that the Department's efforts to rationalize the work of United Nations information centres and to strengthen their role at local level would enable public opinion to become more fully informed about the work of the United Nations. At the same time, particular care should be taken over

the issue of integrating information centres with UNDP field offices. Although the Rapporteur of the Committee on Information had indicated that several delegations had welcomed the integration which was being implemented in 16 countries, his delegation advocated an individual approach to the issue that took into account the views of the host countries' Governments.

36. Special note should be made of the Department's excellent work in disseminating information about General Assembly decisions designed to eliminate apartheid. It was important for such work to continue in order to help the South African Government to finally turn that dark and shameful page in the history of mankind. In order to address the new tasks facing the United Nations, the Department had to have adequate human and financial resources. Benin therefore supported the proposal to increase the Department's professional staff in order to enhance the effective management of the Department's information network with regard to economic, social and humanitarian issues; activities concerning the African continent; cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity in television and radio broadcasting; and cooperation between the Department and the regional commissions.

37. Although United Nations radio broadcasts could be heard practically everywhere, even in Africa, they were almost always relayed in one language. That deprived millions of people of the opportunity to familiarize themselves with United Nations activities. Very little had been done in the United Nations to eliminate that inequality in the use of two working languages. For example, speeches by the Secretary-General's representative were always broadcast exclusively in English. The recording of the speech was also issued in English, thus creating the impression that only the New York mass media had the right to know what was happening in the United Nations. The same was true of the daily summary of United Nations events, published under the title Highlights, which was published only in English. Very often those materials were faxed to the information centres, where they could not be utilized to the full unless the official language at the centre was English. His delegation called on the Department to deal with those shortcomings and fully implement the appropriate resolutions on that issue.

38. A similar situation pertained to radio programmes. In implementing the relevant General Assembly resolutions, the Department should review the composition of its personnel with a view to eliminating the imbalance between programmes in French and English. Two weekly programmes entitled Perspectives Internationales and Femmes deserved high praise, but there was still room for improvement. They were basically adapted from the English, and consequently were not always suited to French-speaking countries. If the problem was a lack of French-speaking staff, then it should be tackled in the spirit of the General Assembly resolution.

39. Regarding television, the imbalance was even starker. Many Member States would like the Department's television section to set up interviews with French-speaking politicians visiting United Nations Headquarters. A television programme that used clips from speeches by French-speaking delegates to the

United Nations should be initiated. The weekly television programme World Chronicle, broadcast in English, deserved high praise. His delegation requested that the relevant staff should think about preparing a similar version in French.

40. Benin had upheld and defended freedom of the press as a fundamental human right, thus explaining why it advocated the free exchange of information and views. That freedom was guaranteed in Benin by an officially instituted body, the Audiovisual Media and Communications Authority, one of whose tasks was to remind the State authorities and public opinion that freedom of speech was a cornerstone of democracy and a prerequisite for peace and development. In that connection his delegation welcomed the Declaration of Santiago on Media Development and Democracy in Latin American and the Caribbean and the Plan of Action adopted at the Seminar held in Santiago from 2 to 6 May 1994 by the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNDP.

41. He proposed that the two draft resolutions submitted by the Committee on Information should be adopted without a vote.

42. Mrs. NTIBAHEZWA (Burundi) said that the Department of Public Information must be given the financial support for it to be able to inform world public opinion in a clear and timely manner about the purposes and activities of the United Nations. With regard to the Department's provision of information about peace-keeping operations, she wished to stress that the delegation of Burundi had supported resolution 48/42 of 10 December 1993, which called for rapid deployment at the start of a peace-keeping operation of a robust media programme.

43. It was grateful to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive assistance in the implementation of the General Assembly resolutions on the establishment of United Nations information centres, particularly the one in Bujumbura. It had repeatedly called for the restoration of the post of director of the centre, which had been vacant since September 1989. However, the UNDP office in Bujumbura had officially informed the Government of Burundi of its intention to integrate with the centre. Accordingly, since in the integration process it was essential to avoid any policy of faits accomplis and to seek the opinions of the Governments of the countries concerned, her own Government emphasized its wish to keep the centre as an independent operation, for the coordination duties of the UNDP Resident Representative in Bujumbura gave him little time to perform fully the function of head of the information centre.

44. Mr. KANAKARATNE (Sri Lanka) said that his delegation took note with satisfaction of the report of the Committee on Information (A/49/21), the report of the Secretary-General (A/49/385), and the valuable statement made in the Fourth Committee by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information. The information provided by those three sources certainly underlined the importance of the policies and strategies needed for the effective conduct of the information activities of the United Nations. In his report the Secretary-General had referred to the responsibilities of the Department of Public

Information, and the Assistant Secretary-General had assured the Committee that the Department's staff were aware of those responsibilities and would make every effort to meet them. The delegation of Sri Lanka drew the attention of the members of the Committee to their own responsibility to ensure that DPI received adequate financial and manpower resources to achieve the desired results. In turn, DPI must endeavour to ensure that such resources were used effectively.

45. It must be remembered that the consumers of information were attracted largely by exciting and sensational items of news. The news media therefore, taking consumer taste into account, focused disproportionately on the peace-keeping and other more visible activities of the United Nations rather than on such issues as sustained social and economic growth, protection of human rights and provision of humanitarian relief. Accordingly, it was essential to ensure the balanced and properly focused dissemination of information about all the work of the United Nations. To that end the Department should establish closer links with national and international media. It would hardly be possible to achieve the desired results without a meaningful and understanding partnership between the United Nations information system and the media. Such a working relationship could be achieved by interaction between DPI and the media organizations accredited to the United Nations, and the United Nations Correspondents' Association could be a vital tool in establishing a continuing dialogue.

46. Public interest in United Nations activities was aroused most strongly when an international crisis led the Security Council to decide on preventive or curative measures in situations involving the use or threat of force. However, the international media had a duty not to ignore the Organization's other equally important activities such as assisting the economic development of States, preserving social stability in certain areas, raising the living standards of millions of human beings, including children, and protecting the human rights and dignity of thousands of people. The Department had a corresponding obligation to ensure that the media were constantly provided with the necessary printed and audiovisual materials. The network of United Nations information centres had an important role in that regard. Sri Lanka believed that the activities of the centres should be promoted, especially in the developing countries, where the dissemination of news was for obvious reasons more limited than in the developed countries, and that the centres should be manned by professionally qualified personnel.

47. To ensure objective reporting on United Nations peace-keeping operations and avoid over-dramatization of events, the Department must make the necessary arrangements to organize briefings for representatives of the media, in order to explain to them the intricacies of each separate operation and the difficulties with which it had to cope.

48. Mr. Hudyma (Ukraine) took the Chair.

49. Mrs. HOANG THI CU (Viet Nam) said that the world was currently undergoing profound changes and that the trend towards dialogue and cooperation between States was gaining ground. The establishment of a new united, democratic and

non-racial State in South Africa and the progress towards the restoration of peace in the Middle East were very encouraging. The invaluable contribution of the Department of Public Information to those successes deserved commendation.

50. The international community was profoundly concerned about the increasing number of conflicts which were taking lives and inflicting suffering on people as well as causing regional and international instability. And there were many other global problems such as the population explosion, environmental degradation and the spread of dangerous diseases. In order to solve these problems the international community must join forces to promote cooperation. The interrelation between peace, security and development was today more obvious than ever before. Viet Nam believed that the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of economic and social development were the two primary tasks of the United Nations, and information activities had an important part to play in the accomplishment of those tasks.

51. The delegation of Viet Nam had studied the report of the Committee on Information with interest and welcomed the two draft resolutions contained therein which were to be submitted to the General Assembly with a recommendation for adoption by consensus.

52. It fully supported the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and would like to draw attention to a few points of great importance to Viet Nam. There now existed a widening gap between developed and developing countries in the area of information and communications, and that imbalance might become more acute unless the developing countries were helped to overcome the technical and financial difficulties impeding the development of their communication infrastructure and capabilities. Furthermore, there was an urgent need to create a new more just and more effective world information and communication order, as advocated by UNESCO and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Such a new order must respect the cultural and social values and the unique features and sovereignty of all States. A wider and better balanced dissemination of information would surely help to strengthen international peace and security and promote mutual understanding, friendship and cooperation among States. In order to attain that end the United Nations must intensify its efforts in the area of information, and Viet Nam welcomed in that connection the continued cooperation between DPI and UNESCO, particularly in the implementation of the International Programme for the Development of Communications

53. The delegation of Viet Nam believed that the integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices should be approached with caution on a case-by-case basis and that the views of the host countries should be taken into account. In the countries which did not have information centres DPI must give high priority to the provision of more information materials, training and other assistance.

54. Mr. VALDES LOPEZ (Cuba) said that his delegation had carefully studied the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Department of Public Information and approved the structural changes in the Department, particularly

those relating to enhanced coordination of public information and publishing activities and to the functions of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General. He hoped that the Spokesman would keep delegations more extensively informed about the work of the Security Council. He also welcomed the cooperation between the Department and national press correspondents covering the visits of heads of State and Government to New York at the beginning of the current session. Further progress by the Department could help resolve the serious problems experienced by many developing countries in gaining access to independent information, because of the control exercised by the major transnational media corporations of the North.

55. Cuba believed that appropriate efforts should be made to publicize efforts to elaborate a development programme designed to ensure the sustainable economic growth of third-world countries and to create favourable conditions for the development of a new and fairer system of international economic relations. Such a development programme had not yet been developed, and that circumstance should be borne in mind during the preparation of information materials on the issue, including reports to the General Assembly.

56. The publicizing of peacemaking and peace-keeping activities was highly commendable, but efforts should be made to ensure that the Department's efforts in that area were not carried out to the detriment of other aspects, such as the dissemination of information on social and economic development.

57. As for the integration of information centres with UNDP field offices, Cuba believed that the matter should be pursued on a case-by-case basis and with the agreement of the Governments concerned.

58. One of the Organization's priorities was the establishment of a new, more just and effective world information and communication order, yet many States remained unable to ensure a proper exchange of information with other States. The resolution of that problem had always been of extreme importance for Cuba; accordingly, it participated actively in the work of the Fourth Committee, the Committee on Information and UNESCO. In addition, it was developing bilateral relations with many countries and implementing its own national programmes. A powerful neighbouring State was, however, taking steps to block Cuba's access to technology and to control the information which reached it. In so doing, that State was ignoring declarations that such a policy was illegal, its condemnation by various international organizations and Cuba's readiness to develop information exchanges with any country on the basis of mutual respect. The instruments for that radio- and television-based aggression against Cuba were numerous official short-wave commercial stations and also some unofficial short-wave stations, operating with the connivance of the authorities. One example was the official radio station Radio Martí, broadcasting on short and medium wave to Cuba from the territory of the United States and financed by the Government of that country. There was also a television station TV Martí, which operated in contravention of the decision of the International Frequency Registration Committee. Those actions violated the most elementary standards of international coexistence and various conventions and regulations in the field of telecommunications, were contrary to the spirit of the Charter of the United

Nations and should be stopped. Only by so doing would it be possible to create a new world information and communication order.

59. Ms. KOUVAHE-KPOTSRA (Togo) said that the sound use of information would not only strengthen the role of the United Nations in the harmonious development of the world but would also help bring together peoples with different cultures and levels of development. Information was of crucial importance at the current time, since it helped to accelerate the economic, political, social and cultural development of humankind. In that connection, her delegation supported the comments made on behalf of the Group of 77 by the representative of Algeria, stressing the need for a new, balanced information order. The developing countries should have free access to information and be given the right to convey their news first-hand. The Organization should endeavour to eradicate the existing inequality between developed and developing countries in vocational training and in access to the media and modern media technologies.

60. In connection with the forthcoming fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, Togo wished to draw attention to such aspects of the information issue as the situation regarding United Nations information centres, the dissemination of information and the situation of women in the Department.

61. Information centres should play a vital role in propagating the ideals of peace and the development goals promoted by the United Nations. In that connection Togo supported the position of the Group of 77 regarding the integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, which, in view of the increasingly prominent role played by those centres, might adversely impact on the effectiveness of their work. Extreme caution must be exercised in that undertaking, which should be pursued on a case-by-case basis, taking due account of the need to ensure the functional independence and administrative autonomy of those centres.

62. As for the dissemination of information in the developing countries, the issue was one of particular importance for her delegation. In that connection, she welcomed the Department's efforts to increase the number of publications relating to international conferences on development and social issues. Radio programmes had always been and would long continue to be the most convenient source of information for entire population groups. The United Nations radio station must be equipped with the necessary technical and financial resources to enable it to perform its functions more effectively, particularly with regard to the developing countries. She also stressed the need to expand broadcasting services in the French language for francophone African countries. At the same time, the content of radio programmes both in English and in French should be made more interesting and the themes more varied, particularly through broader coverage of socio-economic development issues.

63. Finally, with regard to the situation of women in the Department, Togo regretted that the Organization, which was called upon to uphold social justice and to respect and promote human rights, had on its staff so few women in general and, in particular, women from African countries.

64. In conclusion, she hoped that the draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Information, entitled "Information in service of humanity" and "United Nations public information policies and activities", would be adopted by consensus.

65. Mr. ABDERAHMAN (Egypt) said that the radical changes in the nature of international relations following the end of the cold war had created a demand for the United Nations to play a more active role in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping and post-conflict peace-building. It was now, more than ever, a matter of urgency for the Organization to carry out its functions under the Charter, particularly in assisting developing countries in overcoming their economic hardships.

66. It was obvious that each of the Organization's activities should have its own information component. Bearing in mind that the world was becoming smaller every day as a result of the communications revolution and that, because of what had been called "the Cable News Network effect", public opinion was playing a much greater role in shaping foreign policy decisions, information on certain United Nations operations and its availability and timing could, to a great extent, determine the effectiveness of those operations in fulfilling their mandates.

67. The information campaigns of the United Nations had contributed significantly to the decolonization process during the last five decades. In that context, his delegation supported the reallocation of resources which had become available as a result of the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and previously assigned to fight apartheid, to fund other information campaigns in the African continent, particularly the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

68. The significant progress achieved towards a solution of the problem of Palestine should lead to the full implementation of the resolutions of the Security Council on that matter and the exercise of the national rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination. His delegation wished to emphasize the importance of the programmes of the Department of Public Information and its publications on Palestine, which would promote wider support for the peace process in the occupied territories and the backing of public opinion in the donor countries.

69. Turning to the peace-keeping operations of the United Nations, he said that it was important that the Organization should regularly provide appropriate information to the media, thus making it possible to provide a more objective image of those operations and to generate public support which, in its turn, would assist in resolving problems connected with the contribution of troops to peacemaking operations, in the fulfilment of their mandates, in overcoming the financial crisis in that area and in improving the safety of United Nations personnel.

70. He noted with satisfaction that the Department of Public Information was using technological innovations such as on-line access, interactive networks and

the Radio Bulletin Board. The Department could provide more resources for the training of potential users of such services, particularly from developing countries. The United Nations information centres could play a major role in disseminating information about such services to journalists and academics. The integration of such centres with the field offices of UNDP should not adversely affect their ability to carry out their tasks.

71. Mr. STEWARD (South Africa), referring to the important role of the Department of Public Information in bringing about significant changes in South Africa said that, in many publications and broadcasts - for which a special unit had been created - the world's attention had been focused on efforts to eliminate apartheid. With the successful completion of that campaign, it had become possible for the General Assembly to dismantle its anti-apartheid information activities, as proposed in the report of the Committee on Information (A/49/21).

72. At the same time, there remained a need for cooperation between South Africa and the United Nations in the information field. The role that the United Nations could play in the new struggle in South Africa, the struggle against poverty and underdevelopment, was no less important than the political struggle that had already been won. The Government of South Africa was fully aware of the importance of information issues, both regionally and internationally, as was shown by the holding of the Conference of OAU Ministers of Information on 4 October 1994, at Sun City in South Africa. His country had also been elected to the Chair of the Intergovernmental Council for Communications in Africa for 1994/95.

73. South Africa was aware that the Organization attached great importance to sustainable development issues. Information could be a powerful stimulus to development, for example in the training field. In that connection his delegation associated itself with the statement by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, affirming the primacy of development in the area of information. His Government was committed to the building of a democratic and non-racial South Africa. The transitional constitution enshrined democratic principles which empowered the people to participate in the governance of the country and required the Government to be accountable to them for its decisions. Information was an integral part of that process, particularly the activities of the communications media. In that context his Government had taken steps to assure the adoption early the following year of an Act to ensure freedom of information and open government. Wishing to make a contribution to addressing the serious information and communication challenges facing the African continent, South Africa would adhere to the Pan-African News Agency Convention.

74. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would continue its general debate on agenda item 80 and would conclude it on Monday, 31 October, after taking a decision on the draft proposals contained in document A/49/21 and also on the verbal amendment introduced by the Rapporteur of the Committee on Information to the draft proposals contained in paragraph 62 of the Committee's report. He informed the Committee that the representatives of the Congo, the Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania had expressed the wish to participate in the debate

on the item. Since the list of speakers had been closed on 26 October 1994, he asked whether the members of the Committee had any objection to the inclusion of those delegations in the list of speakers. If there were no objections, the Congo, the Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania would be added to the list.

75. It was so decided.

76. Mr. DOUGLAS (United States of America), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, pointed out that the representatives of some delegations were once again seeking to divert the Committee from the item on its agenda. As in the past, the Cuban delegation was addressing a matter that was of little interest, namely the points made concerning the Radio Martí and TV Martí programmes.

77. In his delegation's view, the activities of Radio Martí and TV Martí demonstrated the key role played by open debate on important issues in the encouragement of democratic change. They were also proof of the interest shown by the United States Government in bringing about change by peaceful means. The purpose of those programmes was to bring the Cuban people the news and information which they were denied by their Government. The previous winter Radio Martí had broadcast two hearings by United States congressional committees on legislation affecting United States policy on Cuba. Thanks to those broadcasts, Cubans had been able to hear at first hand, possibly for the first time in more than 30 years, a real debate on that question. Those stations also pursued purely practical aims. In connection with the sharp increase in the number of persons attempting to reach the United States from Cuba on rafts, his Government had used rented commercial radio broadcast time and had extended the duration of the Radio Martí and TV Martí programmes in order to warn the Cubans of the dangers of the high seas. In those broadcasts the United States Government had also explained that such persons would not be allowed to enter the territory of the United States and that they would be sent to "safe havens". Those actions had helped save many Cuban lives.

78. The Voice of America radio station had been broadcasting to Cuba for more than 25 years, using internationally recognized and accepted technical and operational characteristics. In 1985 the United States Information Agency, of which Voice of America was a part, had begun transmitting Radio Martí on the same frequency on which Voice of America was transmitted. Although broadcasts by that station had been jammed in the Havana area, the programme had become popular throughout Cuba.

79. In April 1990 Cuba had stepped up jamming of that channel, in contravention of its treaty obligations. Voice of America programmes were broadcast to Cuba in full compliance with United States and international legal requirements. In conclusion, he expressed regret at the attempt being made by Cuba to politicize the work of the Committee, and said that the United States Government steadfastly observed its international obligations, particularly those in the framework of the International Telecommunication Union concerning harmful interference with the radio stations of other States, including Cuba. In his delegation's view, the opposition of the Cuban Government to the Radio Martí and TV Martí broadcasts was attributable solely to its fear of the consequences of

permitting the Cuban people to enjoy the freedom to which all human beings were entitled.

80. Mr. VALDES LOPEZ (Cuba), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the population of Cuba had full enjoyment of the right to freedom of information. It was possible to receive the broadcasts of more than 600 radio stations as well as CNN television programmes in Cuba, and there were more than 120 accredited foreign correspondents. The broadcasts transmitted to Cuba from the United States were designed, not to ensure the free flow of information, but to pursue purely political ends. Although the representative of the United States affirmed that those broadcasts had helped save the lives of many Cubans who had intended to try to reach the shores of the United States on rafts, it should not be forgotten that the United States had actually used its own mass media to incite those people to undertake those rash acts. Cuba was ready to enter into telecommunication agreements with any State, but it would not give in to blatant external pressure.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.